

First Presbyterian Church,
Cairo, Greene County,
New York.

HABS No. 4-25

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District No. 4
Southern New York State

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Wm. Dewey Foster, District Officer,
25 West 45th Street, New York City.

HABS
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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Main Street, Cairo, Greene County, N.Y.

Location, Date and History

Placed back from the main highway some 75 feet, surrounded by lawn and trees, this white building with its long green shutters has quiet dignity and great charm. A double row of trees lines the walk leading straight to the main door, their branches forming a frame for the tower and doorway.

A post-card view of the church printed some years ago shows a white picket fence at the sidewalk.

Unusual difficulty has been encountered in discovering historical data regarding the building and any important events which have transpired there. The records of the church have been three times destroyed by fire; first, in the house of Daniel Sayre, Jan. 28, 1808; second, in the house of Jason Stevens, Sept. 1, 1862; and lastly, in the house of Ezra M. Stevens, April 19, 1864. Nevertheless, a few historical items taken from other old records, and a few supplied from the recollections of Jason Stevens who was clerk fifty years ago, appear in the History of Greene County, (4to, published by J.B. Beers & Co., N.Y. City, 1884, pp. 210-11).

From this source we gather that "The Presbyterian Church of Christ, in Cairo" was organized by the Rev. Beriah Hotchkin of Greeneville, May 22, 1799. The names of the members of the first organization, three men and five women, are given.

The present edifice was built in 1806.

A letter written about 1839 by Daniel Sayre, one of the organizers, is printed, giving a good review of the Church's religious activities and personalia down to the time he wrote. He closes with the sad reflection: "What a sorrowful thought and lamentable state this church is in."

A complete list of the pastors, commencing with the Rev. Richard Williams in 1812, and continuing to the Rev. Sanford W. Roe who began his pastorate on May 1, 1883, is added.

There were 70 communicants in 1885. The value of the church, parsonage, and session-room was set down as only \$6,000.

Through the courtesy of the Rev. Lewis S. Mudge, D.D., LL.D., Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, a careful search was made (between June 18 and 25, 1934) in the Library of the Department of History connected with his office to discover if possible, in response to inquiry, any anniversary sermons or other source material likely to fill the gaps, to supply the surprising loss, in the records of this old church. General histories, the Ecclesiastical Records of New York State, and histories of different Presbyteries yielded no information. The Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, however, mention the Cairo Church first in 1814, with the name of the Rev. Richard Williams beside it. From 1814 to the present time, the Minutes were searched and the names of the stated ministers or "supplies" were listed as follows (including those opposite whose names was written "without charge," meaning perhaps that they were not the regular pastors):

Richard Williams
 Joel F. Bennedit (W.C.)
 Daniel Beers
 Alvin Somers (W.C.)
 J. Judson Buck (W.C.)
 William Johnson (W.C.)
 George A Howard (P.)
 Sanford W. Roe, M.D. (P.)
 Alexander O. Peloubet (P.)
 Andrew P. Freese (S.S.)
 Walter S. Drysdale (S.S.)
 Peter Snyder (P.)
 George A. Howard (P.)

Cyrus L. Offer (S.S.)
 Rufus King (P.)
 John C. French, Jr. (P.)
 Harold C. Harmon (P.)
 Augustus S. Buchanan (P.)
 Robert Branfitt (P.)
 Isaac N. Steelman (P.)
 William Mackay (S.S.)
 Henry E. Stammer (P.)
 Andrew B. Imrie (S.S.)
 W. Stanley Shuker (P.)

The General Assembly's files were examined to see if any of these ministers had published a discourse relating to the history of the Church; but if any ~~had done~~ ^{did} so there is no copy of it in that collection.

Architectural features

The architectural treatment of this building is in the classic style, severely simple and with real Greek character in the flat but refined moldings. The entire building, including the pilasters, is of wood, and its front is covered with flush siding.

Formerly there was a clock face on the square tower; and the clock "movement" is still to be found inside at the lower landing. This is shown in the drawings. The church bell is in the tower.

Originally there were two doors from the vestibule to the auditorium instead of the one present double door.

Inside, the plaster reveals that the balcony extended originally down both side walls as well as across the rear where it is now. At that time the choir occupied the rear gallery instead of being, as at present, back of the minister's chair.

About 1900, when alterations were made, an apse was added back of the platform and the organ placed there. It probably was formerly in the balcony at the rear.

A wing was also added at that time at the back, extending to the east of the building. This houses the Sunday School and other Church activities.

Much of the original character of the old building was lost in alterations and refurbishing, as so often happens when "improvements" are undertaken in early American churches. However, on account of the simple plan and high windows with their original muntins along the side walls, there still remains much architectural charm.

(From field notes of the architects of the present survey.)

Written, June 26, 1934, by

Thomas W. Hotchkiss

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Approved:

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Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.